

Contents at a Glance

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Part I: The Big Picture of California Wine</i>	9
Chapter 1: Introducing California Wines	11
Chapter 2: What's in the Bottle	25
Chapter 3: Decoding the Label	41
Chapter 4: California's Major Wine Regions	57
<i>Part II: The Headliners</i>	85
Chapter 5: Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc	87
Chapter 6: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Their Blends	111
Chapter 7: Pinot Noir	135
Chapter 8: Zinfandel.....	159
<i>Part III: More Reds, Whites, Pinks, and Bubbli</i>	171
Chapter 9: Pinot Grigio, Rhône-Style Whites, and Other California Whites	173
Chapter 10: Syrah, Petite Sirah, Other Varietal Reds, and Red Blends	185
Chapter 11: Bubbly, Rosé, and Dessert Wines	207
<i>Part IV: Enjoying California Wines</i>	217
Chapter 12: Pairing and Sharing California Wines	219
Chapter 13: Making a Winery Pilgrimage	231
<i>Part V: The Part of Tens</i>	241
Chapter 14: Answers to Ten Common Questions about California Wine	243
Chapter 15: Ten Top Travel Destinations and Attractions.....	249
<i>Index</i>	257

Table of Contents

***Introduction*..... 1**

About This Book	1
Conventions Used in This Book	2
What You're Not to Read	3
Foolish Assumptions	4
How This Book Is Organized	4
Part I: The Big Picture of California Wine	5
Part II: The Headliners	5
Part III: More Reds, Whites, Pinks, and Bubbles	6
Part IV: Enjoying California Wines	6
Part V: The Part of Tens	6
Icons Used in This Book	7
Where to Go from Here	8

***Part 1: The Big Picture of California Wine*..... 9**

Chapter 1: Introducing California Wines 11

Covering All the Bases in Wine Production.....	11
The color and type spectrums	12
The wallet spectrum.....	12
The packaging spectrum	14
Leading the Market in Popularity	15
Golden Resources in the Golden State.....	16
California climate.....	16
Soil matters.....	18
The human factor	19
California's Wine Timeline.....	20
Planting the seeds in the 18th century	20
The founder and other pioneers.....	21
Surviving Prohibition	22
Reinventing itself in the 1960s	22
Expanding in the late 20th and early 21st centuries	23

Chapter 2: What's in the Bottle 25

The Grape Names the Wine	25
Varietal wine: A wine that is what it (mostly) is	26
Quality claims: What varietal does not imply	28

Wines without Varietal Names	29
Blends: Naming when the point is	
multiple grape varieties	29
Emulating European classics	30
Period pieces, generically speaking	31
The In-Crowd: California's Major Varietal Wines	32
Chardonnay	32
Sauvignon Blanc	33
Cabernet Sauvignon	34
Zinfandel	35
Merlot	36
Pinot Noir	36
Syrah/Shiraz	37
Other California Varietal Wines	37
Whites	38
Reds	39
Even less-known varieties	40
Chapter 3: Decoding the Label	41
Label Terms and What They (Sorta) Mean	42
Regulated wine terms	42
Unregulated terms intended to influence you	49
Official Grape-Growing Areas	50
Europe's tradition of viticultural areas	50
AVAs, America's version of European tradition	51
Small, large, and overlapping AVAs	52
Chapter 4: California's Major Wine Regions	57
Location Matters	57
Napa Valley: Wine Country's Hollywood	59
Mapping Napa Valley	60
Napa's key wines	61
Getting to and staying in Napa Valley	63
Sonoma County: Hardly an Also-ran!	65
An idyllic wine region	67
Sonoma's signatures: Pinot Noir and Zinfandel	70
Sonoma's wines: Something for everyone	70
More Key Wine Regions	71
Up the North Coast to Mendocino	
and Lake Counties	72
Down the Central Coast	73
Southern California	80
Inward and upward	81

***Part 11: The Headliners* 85**

Chapter 5: Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc 87

Chardonnay: The Wine That California Made Famous 88
 A brief history of California Chardonnay..... 88
 The taste of California Chardonnay 90
 For richer or for value..... 91
 Where Chardonnay Grows in California 91
 Cool, coastal classic regions 92
 Warm regions for everyday Chardonnays..... 94
 Top Chardonnay Producers 94
 Sauvignon Blanc: Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride..... 97
 Some history on Sauvignon Blanc 99
 Three styles of California Sauvignon Blanc..... 100
 Taste trumps price 101
 Regions for Sauvignon Blanc 102
 Napa originals 102
 Sonoma takes on Sauvignon..... 103
 Top Sauvignon Blanc wines from other regions..... 105
 Names to Trust in Sauvignon Blanc..... 108

**Chapter 6: Cabernet Sauvignon,
 Merlot, and Their Blends. 111**

Hailing the California Cab, a World-Class Red 112
 A brief history of Cabernet 112
 The taste of California Cabernet..... 113
 Making a California original from
 a Bordeaux grape 114
 Where the Cabernet Grows: Our
 Cabernet Recommendations 116
 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons 116
 Sonoma Cabernets..... 121
 Santa Cruz Mountain Cabernet Sauvignons 123
 Other California Cabernets..... 125
 Merlot, Sometimes a Contender..... 125
 Merlot’s up, down, and Sideways reputation..... 126
 The taste of California Merlot 126
 Regions That Excel with Merlot 127
 Reliable Napa Valley Merlots 129
 Other California Merlots 130
 The Secret’s in the Bordeaux Blend 130
 Combining strengths 131
 Key brands of Bordeaux-style blends 132

Chapter 7: Pinot Noir 135

From Obscurity to Overnight Fame.....	136
California-Style Pinot Noir	137
The general style	137
Local styles	138
California's Pinot Noir Regions	140
The classic regions	141
Hot new Pinot Noir regions	150
Sonoma Coast AVA.....	155
Pinot Noirs in other regions	157

Chapter 8: Zinfandel 159

Tracing California's (Almost) Native Grape	159
What's Special about Zinfandel.....	161
The Spectrum of Zin Styles.....	162
Zinfandel Country	163
Recommended Zinfandel Wines.....	166

***Part III: More Reds, Whites,
Pinks, and Bubblys 171*****Chapter 9: Pinot Grigio, Rhône-Style Whites,
and Other California Whites 173**

Here a Grigio, There a Gris	173
The California face of Italy's leading white	174
The taste of California Pinot Grigio/Gris	175
Recommended California Pinot Grigio/Gris wines	177
White Wines from Rhône Varieties.....	178
The taste of white Rhône varietals and blends	179
California white Rhône wines to try.....	180
More California White Wines.....	181
Riesling.....	182
Gewurztraminer	182
Chenin Blanc	183
Pinot Blanc.....	183

**Chapter 10: Syrah, Petite Sirah, Other
Varietal Reds, and Red Blends 185**

California Syrah Comes of Age	185
Number five in production but growing	186
Syrah versus Shiraz	187
The taste of California Syrah.....	187
Today's hotbeds of Syrah and Shiraz	189
Recommended Syrah wines	191

The Dark and Mysterious Petite Sirah 194
 The great identity search 194
 Petite Sirah’s ups and downs 195
 The taste of Petite Sirah..... 195
 Where Petite Sirah grows 196
 Recommended Petite Sirah wines 197
 California’s Red Rhône-style Blends..... 198
 A range of styles..... 198
 When in Rhône: The grapes in Rhône blends 199
 Recommended California red Rhône blends..... 200
 Cal-Ital: Italian Varieties in California 201
 Cal-Ital red grape varieties..... 202
 Recommended Cal-Ital red wines 203
 Other Varietal Reds 204

Chapter 11: Bubbly, Rosé, and Dessert Wines. 207

California’s Sparkling Wines 207
 Characterizing California bubbly..... 208
 French- and California-owned brands 209
 Recommended sparkling wines 210
 Pretty in Pink: California Rosés, Dry and Sweet..... 211
 Serious, dry rosés 212
 White Zinfandel and its blushing cousins..... 213
 Sweet Dessert Wines 215

Part IV: Enjoying California Wines 217

Chapter 12: Pairing and Sharing California Wines . . . 219

Matching Wines to Foods..... 220
 Elements of the match 220
 Try this with that: Wine pairings
 for specific foods 222
 Aging and Collecting California Wines 223
 How different varietal wines age 224
 California wines that have aged well..... 225
 Vintage Variations in California 227
 Cool versus warm vintages 228
 Our California vintage ratings 228

Chapter 13: Making a Winery Pilgrimage. 231

Knowing What to Expect on the Winery Visit 231
 The winery tour 232
 The tasting room and shop 233
 Do’s and Don’ts for Visitors..... 235
 Discover something new..... 235
 Embrace the etiquette of tasting and spitting 236
 Beware the designated driver trap..... 238

Preparing for Your Visit	238
Gather specific info on winery visits.....	238
Know the restrictions on transporting your purchases	240
Part V: The Part of Tens	241
Chapter 14: Answers to Ten Common Questions about California Wine.....	243
What's the Best California Wine?	243
Do Vintages Matter for California Wine?.....	244
Are Ratings Important in Buying California Wine?	244
How Long Should California Wines Age before I Drink Them?	245
Are the \$100+ California Wines Worth the Price?.....	245
Do California Wines Age Well?	245
Are California Pinot Noirs as Good as Red Burgundy?	246
Are California Chardonnays Too Oaky?	247
Are California Rosés Sweet?	247
What's the Story with California Merlots?	247
Chapter 15: Ten Top Travel Destinations and Attractions	249
Yountville, Napa Valley	249
The Ferry Building, San Francisco	250
Picnic Lunches in Wine Country.....	251
The Napa Valley Wine Train	251
Calistoga's Hot Springs and Mud Baths	252
The Sierra Foothills	252
San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles.....	253
Santa Barbara	254
Healdsburg, Sonoma County	254
Mendocino, Anderson Valley	254
Index.....	257